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INTRODUCTION  
TO  
SENECA FICTION, LEGENDS  
AND MYTHS



*Collected by*  
JEREMIAH CURTIN and J. N. B. HEWITT

*Edited by*  
J. N. B. HEWITT

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# SENECA FICTION, LEGENDS, AND MYTHS

Collected by JEREMIAH CURTIN and J. N. B. HEWITT; edited by J. N. B. HEWITT

## INTRODUCTION

### THE SENECA

THE following brief description of the Seneca is taken, with slight alterations, from the article on that tribe in the Handbook of American Indians:

The Seneca (=Place of the Stone) are a noted and influential tribe of the Iroquois, or the so-called Five Nations of New York. When first known they occupied a region in central New York, lying between the western watershed of the Genesee r. and the lands of the Cayuga about Seneca lake, having their council fire at Tsonontowan, near Naples, in Ontario co. After the political destruction of the Erie and Neuters, about the middle of the 17th century, the Seneca and other Iroquois people carried their settlements westward to L. Erie and southward along the Alleghany into Pennsylvania. They are now settled chiefly on the Allegany, Cattaraugus, and Tonawanda res., N. Y., and some live on Grand River res., Ontario. Various local bands have been known as Buffalo, Tonawanda, and Cornplanter Indians; and the Mingo, formerly in Ohio, have become officially known as Seneca from the large number of that tribe among them.

In the third quarter of the 16th century the Seneca was the last but one of the Iroquois tribes to give its suffrage in favor of the abolition of murder and war, the suppression of cannibalism, and the establishment of the principles upon which the League of the Iroquois was founded. However, a large division of the tribe did not adopt at once the course of the main body, but, on obtaining coveted privileges and prerogatives, the recalcitrant body was admitted as a constituent member in the structure of the League. The two chiefships last added to the quota of the Seneca were admitted on condition of their exercising functions belonging to a sergeant-at-arms of a modern legislative body as well as those belonging to a modern secretary of state for foreign affairs, in addition to their duties as federal chieftains; indeed, they became the warders of the famous "Great Black Doorway" of the League of the Iroquois, called *Ka'nho'hwādjī'gō'nā'* by the Onondaga.

In historical times the Seneca have been by far the most populous of the five tribes originally composing the League of the Iroquois. The Seneca belong in the federal organization to the tribal phratry known by the political name *Hoñdoññis'hē'*, meaning, 'they are clansmen of the fathers,' of which the Mohawk are the other member, when the tribes are organized as a federal council; but when ceremonially organized the Onondaga also belong to this phratry. In the federal council the Seneca are represented by eight federal chiefs, but two of these were added to the original six present

at the first federal council, to give representation to that part of the tribe which had at first refused to join the League. Since the organization of the League of the Iroquois, approximately in the third quarter of the 16th century, the number of Seneca clans, which are organized into two phratries for the performance of both ceremonial and civil functions, have varied. The names of the following nine have been recorded: Wolf, *Hoñmat'haiioñ'nì'*; Bear, *Hodidjioñni'gā'*; Beaver, *Hodigē''gegā'*; Turtle, *Hadiniā'dēñ'*; Hawk, *Hadis'hwe''-gaiiū'*; Sandpiper, *Hodine'si'iu'*, sometimes also called Snipe, Plover, and Killdeer; Deer, *Hadinioñ'guraiiū'*; Doe, *Hodino''dcogā'*, sometimes *Hoñnoñt'-goñdjē''*; Heron, *Hodidaio''gā'*. In a list of clan names made in 1838 by Gen. Dearborn from information given him by Mr Cone, an interpreter of the Tona wanda band, the Heron clan is called the Swan clan with the native name given above. Of these clans only five had an unequal representation in the federal council of the League; namely, the Sandpiper, three, the Turtle, two, the Hawk, one, the Wolf, one, and the Bear, one.

One of the earliest known references to the ethnic name Seneca is that on the Original Carte Figurative, annexed to the Memorial presented to the States-General of the Netherlands, Aug. 18, 1616, on which it appears with the Dutch plural as Sennecas. This map is remarkable also for the first known mention of the ancient Erie, sometimes called Gahkwah or Kabkwah; on this map they appear under the name last cited, *Gachoi* (ch = kh), and were placed on the N. side of the W. branch of the Susquehanna. The name did not originally belong to the Seneca, but to the Oneida, as the following lines will show.

In the early part of December, 1634, three Dutchmen made a journey (the itinerary of which was duly recorded in a Journal<sup>1</sup>) in the interests of the fur-trade from Fort Orange, now Albany, N. Y., to the Mohawk and the "Sinnemens" to thwart French intrigue there. Strictly speaking, the latter name designated the Oneida, but at this time it was a general name, usually comprising the Onondaga, the Cayuga, and the Seneca, in addition. At that period the Dutch and the French commonly divided the Five Iroquois tribes into two identical groups; to the first, the Dutch gave the name Maquas (Mohawk), and to the latter, Sinnemens (Seneca, the final *-ens* being the Dutch genitive plural), with the connotation of the four tribes mentioned above. The French gave to the latter group the general name "les Iroquois Superieurs", "les Hiroquois d'eu haut", i. e. the Upper Iroquois, "les Hiroquois des pays plus hauts, nommés Sontouaherommons" (literally, 'the Iroquois of the upper country, called Sontouaherommons'), the latter being only another form of "les Tsonnontouans" (the Seneca); and to the first group the designations "les Iroquois inférieurs" (the Lower Iroquois), and "les Hiroquois d'en bas, nommés Agnechronnons" (the Mohawk; literally, 'the Iroquois from below, named Agnechronnons'). This geographical rather than political division of the Iroquois tribes, first made by Champlain and the early Dutch at Ft Orange, prevailed until about the third quarter of the 17th century. Indeed, Governor Andros, two years after Greenhalgh's visit to the several tribes of the Iroquois in 1677, still wrote, "Ye Oneidas deemed ye first nation of sineques." The Journal of the Dutchmen.

<sup>1</sup> The manuscript of this Journal was discovered in Amsterdam in 1895 by the late Gen. James Grant Wilson, who published it in the *Annual Report of the American Historical Association* for the year 1895, under the caption "Arent Van Curler And His Journal of 1634-35." But the *Van Rensselaer Bowler Manuscripts*, edited by the learned Mr. A. J. F. van Laer, show that van Curler could not have made the journey, as he did not reach Rensselaerswyck until 1637, then a youth of only eighteen. It seems probable that Marmen Meyndertsz van den Bogaert, the surgeon of the fort, was the author of the Journal. Consult the Introduction to this same Journal as published in "Narratives of New Netherland, 1609-1664," ed. by J. Franklin Jameson, in *Original Narratives of Early American History* (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1909).

mentioned above, records the interesting fact that during their visit to the tribes they celebrated the New Year of 1635 at a place called *Ennequttchaga* or *Sinnckens*. The first of these names was the Iroquois, and the second, the Mohegan, name for the place, or, preferably, the Mohegan translation of the Iroquois name. The Dutch received their first knowledge of the Iroquois tribes through the Mohegan. The name *Ennequttchaga* is evidently written for *Oněniute'agā'ge'*, 'at the place of the people of the standing (projecting) stone.' At that date this was the chief town of the Oneida. The Dutch Journal identifies the name *Sinnckens* with this town, which is presumptive evidence that it is the Mohegan rendering of the Iroquois local name *Oněniute'*, 'it is a standing or projecting stone', employed as an ethnic appellative. The derivation of *Sinnckens* from Mohegan appears to be as follows: *a'sinni*, 'a stone, or rock', *-ika* or *-iga*, denotive of 'place of', or 'abundance of', and the final *-ens* supplied by the Dutch genitive plural ending, the whole Mohegan synthesis meaning 'place of the standing stone'; and with a suitable pronominal affix, like *o-* or *wā-*, which was not recorded by the Dutch writers, the translation signifies, 'they are of the place of the standing stone.' This etymology is confirmed by the Delaware name, *W'tassone*, for the Oneida, which has a similar derivation. The initial *w-* represents approximately an *o*-sound, and is the affix of verbs and nouns denotive of the third person; the intercalary *-t-* is merely euphonic, being employed to prevent the coalescence of the two vowel sounds; and it is evident that *assone* is only another form of *a'sinni*, 'stone', cited above. Hence it appears that the Mohegan and Delaware names for the Oneida are cognate in derivation and identical in signification. Heckewelder erroneously translated *W'tassone* by 'stone pipe makers.'

Thus, the Iroquois *Oněniute'ā'gā'*, the Mohegan *Sinnckens*, and the Delaware *W'tassone* are synonymous and are homologous in derivation. But the Dutch, followed by other Europeans, used the Mohegan term to designate a group of four tribes, to only one of which, the Oneida, was it strictly applicable. The name *Sinnckens*, or *Sennecaas* (Visscher's map, *ca.* 1660), became the tribal name of the Seneca by a process of elimination which excluded from the group and from the connotation of the general name the nearer tribes as each with its own proper native name became known to the Europeans. Obviously, the last remaining tribe of the group would finally acquire as its own the general name of the group. The Delaware name for the Seneca was *Meḡaxtīn'nī* (the *Macchachtinni* of Heckewelder), which signifies 'great mountain'; this is, of course, a Delaware rendering of the Iroquois name for the Seneca, *Djiionoñdowānēñ'ā'kā'*, or *Djiionoñdowānēñ'roñ'no'*, 'People of the Great Mountain.' This name appears disguised as *Trudamani* (Cartier, 1534-35), *Entouhonorons*, *Chouontouaroñon*=*Chonontouaronon* (Champlain, 1615), *Oucntouaronons* (Champlain, 1627), and *Tsonontouan* or *Sonontouan* (Jes. Rel., *passim*).

Previous to the defeat and despoliation of the Neuters in 1651 and the Erie in 1656, the Seneca occupied the territory drained by Genesee r., eastward to the lands of the Cayuga along the line of the watershed between Seneca and Cayuga lakes.

The political history of the Seneca is largely that of the League of the Iroquois, although owing to petty jealousies among the various tribes the Seneca, like the others, sometimes acted independently in their dealings with aliens. But their independent action appears never to have been a serious and deliberate rupture of the bonds uniting them with the federal government of the League, thus vindicating the wisdom and foresight of its founders in permitting every tribe to retain and exercise a large measure of autonomy in the structure of the federal government. It was sometimes apparently imperative

that one of the tribes should enter into a treaty or other compact with its enemies, while the others might still maintain a hostile attitude toward the alien contracting party.

During 1622 the Montagnais, the Algonkin, and the Hurons sought to conclude peace with the Iroquois (*Yroquois*=Mohawk division?), because "they were weary and fatigued with the wars which they had had for more than 50 years." The armistice was concluded in 1624, but was broken by the continued guerrilla warfare of the Algonkin warriors; for this reason the Seneca ("Ouentouoronons d'autre nation, amis desdits Yrocois") killed in the "village of the Yrocois" the embassy composed of a Frenchman, Pierre Magnan, and three Algonquian ambassadors. This resulted in the renewal of the war. So in Sept. 1627, the Iroquois, including the Seneca, declared war against the Indians and the French on the St. Lawrence and its northern affluents by sending various parties of warriors against them.

From the Jesuit Relation for 1635 (p. 34, 1858) it is learned that the Seneca, after defeating the Hurons in the spring of 1634, made peace with them. The Hurons in the following year sent an embassy to Sonontouan, the chief town of the Seneca, to ratify the peace, and while there learned that the Onondaga, the Oneida, the Cayuga, and the Mohawk were desirous of becoming parties to the treaty.

In 1639 the war was renewed by the Hurons, who in May captured 12 prisoners from the Seneca, then regarded as a powerful people. The war continued with varying success. The Jesuit Relation for 1641 (p. 75, 1858) says the Seneca were the most feared of the enemies of the Hurons, and that they were only one day's journey from Ongniaahra (Niagara), the most easterly town of the Neuters.<sup>1</sup> The Relation for 1643 (p. 61) says that the Seneca (i. e. "les Iroquois d'en haut"), including the Cayuga, the Oneida, and the Onondaga, equaled, if they did not exceed, in number and power the Hurons, who previously had had this advantage; and that the Mohawk at this time had three villages with 700 or 800 men of arms who possessed 300 arquebuses that they had obtained from the Dutch and which they used with skill and boldness. According to the Jesuit Relation for 1648 (p. 49, 1858), 300 Seneca attacked the village of the Aondironnon, and killed or captured as many of its inhabitants as possible, although this people were a dependency of the Neuters who were at peace with the Seneca at this time. This affront nearly precipitated war between the Iroquois and the Neuters.<sup>2</sup>

The Seneca warriors composed the larger part of the Iroquois warriors who in 1648-49 assailed, destroyed, and dispersed the Huron tribes; it was likewise they who in 1649 sacked the chief towns of the Tionontati, or Tobacco tribe; and the Seneca also took a leading part in the defeat and subjugation of the Neuters in 1651 and of the Erie in 1656. From the *Journal des PP. Jésuites* for 1651-52 (Jes. Rel., Thwaites' ed., xxxvii, 97, 1898) it is learned that in 1651 the Seneca, in waging war against the Neuters, had been so signally defeated that their women and children were compelled to flee from Sonontowan, their capital, to seek refuge among the neighboring Cayuga.

<sup>1</sup> This village of Ongniaahra (Ongiara, Onguiaara, and Sndgiara are other forms found in the literature of the Jesuit Fathers) was situated very probably on or near the site of the village of Youngstown, New York. It is the present Iroquoian name of this village, but not of the river nor of the Falls of Niagara.

<sup>2</sup> The Aondironnon probably dwelt at or near the present Moraviantown, Ontario, Canada, although some Iroquois apply the name to St. Thomas, some distance eastward. Another form of the name is Ahondironnon. The nominal part that is distinctive is thus *Aondi* or *Ahondin*, as written in the *Jesuit Relations*. The modern Iroquoian form is *ẽw, ti'hẽw*, 'The middle or center of the peninsula.'

In 1652 the Seneca were plotting with the Mohawk to destroy and ruin the French settlements on the St. Lawrence. Two years later the Seneca sent an embassy to the French for the purpose of making peace with them, a movement which was probably brought about by their rupture with the Erie. But the Mohawk not desiring peace at that time with the French, perhaps on account of their desire to attack the Hurons on Orleans id., murdered two of the three Seneca ambassadors, the other having remained as a hostage with the French. This act almost resulted in war between the two hostile tribes; foreign affairs, however, were in such condition as to prevent the beginning of actual hostility. On Sept. 19, 1655, Fathers Chaumonot and Dablon, after pressing invitations to do so, started from Quebec to visit and view the Seneca country, and to establish there a French habitation and teach the Seneca the articles of their faith.

In 1657 the Seneca, in carrying out the policy of the League to adopt conquered tribes upon submission and the expression of a desire to live under the form of government established by the League, had thus incorporated eleven different tribes into their body politic.

In 1652 Maryland bought from the Minqua, or Susquehanna Indians, i. e. the Conestoga, all their land claims on both sides of Chesapeake bay up to the mouth of Susquehanna r. In 1663, 800 Seneca and Cayuga warriors from the Confederation of the Five Nations were defeated by the Minqua, aided by the Marylanders. The Iroquois did not terminate their hostilities until famine had so reduced the Conestoga that in 1675, when the Marylanders had disagreed with them and had withdrawn their alliance, the Conestoga were completely subdued by the Five Nations, who thereafter claimed a right to the Minqua lands to the head of Chesapeake bay.

In 1744 the influence of the French was rapidly gaining ground among the Seneca; meanwhile the astute and persuasive Col. Johnson was gradually winning the Mohawk as close allies of the British, while the Onondaga, the Cayuga, and the Oneida, under strong pressure from Pennsylvania and Virginia, sought to be neutral.

In 1686, 200 Seneca warriors went w. against the Miami, the Illinois in the meantime having been overcome by the Iroquois in a war lasting about five years. In 1687 the Marquis Denonville assembled a great horde of Indians from the region of the upper lakes and from the St. Lawrence—Hurons, Ottawa, Chippewa, Missisanga, Miami, Illinois, Montagnais, Amikwa, and others—under Durantaye, DuLuth, and Tonti, to serve as an auxiliary force to about 1,200 French and colonial levies, to be employed in attacking and destroying the Seneca. Having reached Irondequoit, the Seneca landing-place on L. Ontario, Denonville built there a stockade in which he left a garrison of 440 men. Thence advancing to attack the Seneca villages, he was ambushed by 600 or 800 Seneca, who charged and drove back the colonial levies and their Indian allies, and threw the veteran regiments into disorder. Only by the overwhelming numbers of his force was the traitorous Denonville saved from disastrous defeat.

In 1763, at Bloody Run and the Devil's Hole, situated on Niagara r. about 4 m. below the falls, the Seneca ambushed a British supply train on the portage road from Ft Schlosser to Ft Niagara, only three escaping from a force of nearly 100. At a short distance from this place the same Seneca ambushed a British force composed of two companies of troops who were hastening to the aid of the supply train, only eight of whom escaped massacre. These bloody and harsh measures were the direct result of the general unrest of the Six Nations and the western tribes, arising from the manner of the recent occupancy of the posts by the British, after the surrender of Canada by the French

on Sept. 8, 1760. They contrasted the sympathetic and bountiful paternalism of the French régime with the neglect and niggardliness that characterized the British rule. Such was the state of affairs that on July 29, 1761, Sir Wm. Johnson wrote to General Amherst: "I see plainly that there appears to be an universal jealousy amongst every nation, on account of the hasty steps they look upon we are taking towards getting possession of this country, which measures, I am certain, will never subside whilst we encroach within the limits which you may recollect have been put under the protection of the King in the year 1726, and confirmed to them by him and his successors ever since and by the orders sent to the governors not to allow any one of his subjects settling thereon . . . but that it should remain their absolute property." But, by the beginning of the American Revolution, so well had the British agents reconciled them to the rule of Great Britain that the Seneca, together with a large majority of the people of the Six Nations, notwithstanding their pledges to the contrary, reluctantly espoused the cause of the British against the colonies. Consequently they suffered retribution for their folly when Gen. Sullivan, in 1779, after defeating their warriors, burned their villages and destroyed their crops.

There is no historical evidence that the Seneca who were on the Ohio and the s. shore of L. Erie in the 18th and 19th centuries were chiefly an outlying colony from the Iroquois tribe of that name dwelling in New York. The significant fact that in historical times their affiliations were never with the Iroquois, but rather with tribes usually hostile to them, is to be explained on the presumption that they were rather some remnant of a subjugated tribe dependent on the Seneca and dwelling on lands under the jurisdiction of their conquerors. It is a fair inference that they were largely subjugated Erie and Conestoga.

The earliest estimates of the numbers of the Seneca, in 1660 and 1677, give them about 5,000. Later estimates of the population are: 3,500 (1721); 1,750 (1736); 5,000 (1765); 3,250 (1778); 2,000 (1783); 3,000 (1783), and 1,780 (1796). In 1825 those in New York were reported at 2,325. In 1850, according to Morgan, those in New York numbered 2,712, while about 210 more were on Grand River res. in Canada. In 1909 those in New York numbered 2,749 on the three reservations, which, with those on Grand r., Ontario, would give them a total of 2,962. The proportion of Seneca now among the 4,071 Iroquois at Caughnawaga, St Regis, and Lake of Two Mountains, Quebec, can not be estimated.

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#### CHARACTERIZATION OF CONTENTS

The Seneca material embodied in the following pages consists of two parts.

Part 1 comprises the matter recorded in the field by the late Jeremiah Curtin in 1883, 1886, and 1887 on the Cattaraugus reservation, near Versailles, New York, including tales, legends, and myths, several being translations of texts belonging to this collection made by the editor. This work of Mr. Curtin represents in part the results of the first serious attempt to record with satisfactory fullness the folklore of the Seneca.

The material consists largely of narratives or tales of fiction—naïve productions of the story-teller's art which can lay no claim to be called myths, although undoubtedly they contain many things that characterize myths—narratives of the power and deeds of one or more of the personified active forces or powers immanent in and

expressed by phenomena or processes of nature in human guise or in that of birds or beasts. They do not refer to the phenomena personified as things unique, but as equaled or fully initiated by human personages made potent by *orenda*, or magic power, hence they describe a period long after the advent of man on earth, and in this respect do not exhibit the character of myths.

Again, in some of the narratives the same incident or device appears as common property; that is to say, these several stories employ the same episode for the purpose of expansion and to glorify the hero as well as his prowess. An instance in point is that in which the hero himself, or others at his order, gathers the bones of the skeletons of other adventurous heroes like himself, who failed in the tests of *orenda* and so forfeited their lives to the challenger, and, hastily placing them in normal positions with respect to one another, quickens them by exclaiming, "This tall hickory tree will fall on you, brothers, unless you arise at once," while pushing against the tree itself. Sometimes it is a tall pine that so figures in these accounts. Again, a pupil of a sorcerer or a noted witch is forbidden to go in a certain direction, while permission is given to go in any other direction. But at a certain time the budding hero or champion wizard goes surreptitiously in the forbidden direction, and at once there is collision between his *orenda*, or magic power, and that of the well-known wizards and sorcerers dwelling in that quarter. This pupil is usually the only living agent for the preservation of the *orenda* of some noted family of wizards or witches. The hero, after performing certain set tasks, overcomes the enemies of his family and then brings to life those of his kindred who failed in the deadly strife of *orendas*.

The identifications and interpretative field notes accompanying Mr. Curtin's material by some mischance were not made a part of the present collection. Their loss, which has added greatly to the work of the editor, is unfortunate, as Mr. Curtin possessed in so marked a degree the power of seizing readily the motive and significance of a story that his notes undoubtedly would have supplied material for the intelligent explanation and analysis of the products of the Indian mind contained in this memoir.

The texts recorded in the Seneca dialect by Mr. Curtin were very difficult to read, as they had been recorded with a lead pencil and had been carried from place to place until they were for the greater part almost illegible. The fact that these texts were the rough field notes of Mr. Curtin, unrevised and unedited, added to the difficulty of translating them. Fortunately, in editing a large portion of one of these manuscripts, the editor had the assistance of his niece, Miss Caroline G. C. Hewitt, who speaks fluently the Seneca dialect of the Iroquois languages.

Part 2 also consists of Seneca legends and myths, which are translations made expressly for this work from native texts recorded by Mr. Hewitt in the autumn of 1896. Two of the texts so translated appear here, revised and edited, with a closely literal inter-linear translation in English. The matter of Part 2 constitutes about two-fifths of the whole, containing only 31 items, while there are 107 in Part 1; but the latter narratives are uniformly much longer than the former.

The Seneca informants of Mr. Hewitt in the field were Mr. Truman Halftown, Mr. John Armstrong, and Chief Priest Henry Stevens, all of the Cattaraugus Reservation, N. Y. These worthy men, who have all passed away, were uniformly patient, kind, and interested. They were men whose faith in the religion of their ancestors ennobled them with good will, manliness, and a desire to serve.

Special attention is drawn to the freedom of these Seneca narratives from coarseness of thought and expression, although in some respectable quarters obscenity seems to be regarded as a dominant characteristic of American Indian myths and legendary lore. This view is palpably erroneous and unjust, because it is founded on faulty and inadequate material; it is, moreover, governed largely by the personal equation.

To form an impartial and correct judgment of the moral tone of the myths and legends of the American Indian, a distinction must be made between myths and legends on the one hand and tales and stories which are related primarily for the indecent coarseness of their thought and diction on the other; for herein lies the line of demarcation between narratives in which the rare casual references to indelicate matters are wholly a secondary consideration and not the motives of the stories, and those ribald tales in which the evident motive is merely to pander to depraved taste by detailing the coarse, the vulgar, and the filthy in life.

It is, indeed, a most unfortunate circumstance in the present study of the spoken literature of the North American Indians that the headlong haste and nervous zeal to obtain bulk rather than quality in collecting and recording it are unfavorable to the discovery and acquisition of the philosophic and the poetic legends and myths so sacred to these thoughtful people. The inevitable result of this method of research is the wholly erroneous view of the ethical character of the myths and legends and stories of the American Indian, to which reference has already been made. The lamentable fact that large portions of some collections of so-called American Indian tales and narratives consist for the greater part of coarse, obscene, and indelicate recitals in no wise shows that the coarse and the indelicate were the primary motives in the sacred lore of the people, but it does indicate the need of clean-minded collectors of these narratives, men

who know that the obscene can not be the dominant theme of the legendary lore of any people. Such men will take the necessary time and trouble to become sufficiently acquainted with the people whose literature they desire to record to gain the confidence and good will of the teachers and the wise men and women of the community, because these are the only persons capable of giving anything like a trustworthy recital of the legendary and the poetic narratives and the sacred lore of their people.

Should one attempt to acquire standard specimens of the literature of the white people of America by consulting corner loafers and their ilk, thereby obtaining a mass of coarse and obscene tales and stories wholly misrepresenting the living thought of the great mass of the white people of the country, the procedure would in no wise differ, seemingly, from the usual course pursued by those who claim to be collecting the literature of the American Indian people by consulting immature youth, agency interpreters, and other uninformed persons, rather than by gaining the confidence of and consulting the native priests and shamans and statesmen.

To claim that in American Indian communities their story-tellers, owing to alleged Christian influence, are editing the mythic tales and legends of their people into a higher moral tone is specious and is a sop thrown to religious prejudice for the purpose of giving color to the defense of an erroneous view of the moral tone of such myths and legends.

It is notorious that in this transition period of American Indian life the frontiersman and the trader on the borderland have not been in general of such moral character as to reflect the highest ideals in thought or action. Few genuine native legends and myths show any so-called "moral" revision from contact with "white people." It is, of course, undeniable that the coarse, the rude, and the vulgar in word, thought, and deed are very real and ever-present elements in the life of every so-called Christian community; and they are present in every other community. But this fact does not at all argue that it is useful to collect and record in detail the narratives of these indecent aspects of life in any community, because the wholesome, the instructive, and the poetic and beautiful are, forsooth, far more difficult to obtain.

Except in the case of novices in the work it may be stated that the moral tone or quality of the mythic and legendary material collected in any community is measurably an unconscious reflex of the mental and moral attitude of the collector toward the high ideals of the race.

It is a pleasure to make reference here to the work of Mr. Frank Hamilton Cushing, Dr. Washington Matthews, and Mr. Jeremiah Curtin, who, in order to study with discrimination and sympathy the

spoken literature of the American Indians, took the necessary trouble to learn the motif of the narratives of mythic and legendary origin of these people; hence they did not feel it incumbent upon them to apologize for the moral tone of the legends and myths they recorded and published, for their own mental attitude toward the wholesome, the worthy, and the noble was such as to enable them to discover and to appreciate the same qualities in the thinking of the people they studied. To expound like the priest, to speak like the prophet, and to think like the myth-maker, were among the gifts of these men which enabled them to understand the motives underlying the myths and legends of the tribal men of the world, while they were at the same time fully alive to the scientific use and value of these same poetic narratives when analyzed and interpreted sympathetically.

Mr. Curtin obtained his Seneca material from the following persons of the Seneca tribe, many of whom have since died: Abraham Johnny-John, Solomon O'Bail, George Titus, John Armstrong, Zachariah Jameson, Andrew Fox, Henry Jacob, Henry Silverheels, Peter White, Black Chief, and Phoebe Logan. He recorded an extensive vocabulary of the Seneca, with which he had become familiar by intensive study of its structure.

Mr. Curtin, with the mind of a master, fully grasped the importance and the paramount significance of the intelligent collection, and the deeper sympathetic study, of legends and myths in general, and of those of the American Indians in particular, in the final establishment of the science of mythology.

To the editor it is one of the delightful memories of his early official life to recall the many instructive hours spent with Mr. Curtin in discussing the larger significance and the deeper implications which are found in the intelligent study and interpretation of legends, epics, and myths--the highest type of poetic and creative composition. And for this reason he has so freely cited from the writings of Mr. Curtin the meaning and the value which such a study and analysis had for Mr. Curtin and has for those who like him will fully appreciate that "the Indian tales reveal to us a whole system of religion, philosophy, and social polity. . . . the whole mental and social life of the race to which they belong is evident in them."

The following quotations give all too briefly, perhaps, his philosophic views on these questions in his own deft, inimitable way. It is believed that these citations will enable the reader and the student to gain some clear idea of the pregnant lessons Mr. Curtin drew from the analysis and interpretation of the legends and myths which he recorded, as well as of his method of studying and expounding them. The Seneca collection herewith presented forms only a small portion of his recorded mythic material.

A few tens of years ago it was all-important to understand and explain the brotherhood and blood-bond of Aryan nations, and their relation to the Semitic

race; to discover and set forth the meaning of that which in mental work, historic strivings, and spiritual ideals ties the historic nations to one another. At the present time this work is done, if not completely, at least measurably well, and a new work awaits us, to demonstrate that there is a higher and a mightier bond, the relationship of created things with one another, and their inseverable connection with That which some men reverence as God, but which other men call the Unknowable, the Unseen.

This new work, which is the necessary continuation of the first, and which alone can give it completeness and significance, will be achieved when we have established the science of mythology.<sup>1</sup>

Again, he asks: "How is this science from which men may receive such service to be founded?"

On this point Mr. Curtin is clear and instructive, maintaining that such a science of mythology can be founded—

In one way alone: by obtaining from races outside of the Aryan and Semitic their myths, their beliefs, their view of the world; this done, the rest will follow as a result of intelligent labor. But the great battle is in the first part of the work, for the inherent difficulty of the task has been increased by Europeans, who have exterminated great numbers among the best primitive races, partially civilized or rather degraded others, and rendered the remainder distrustful and not easily approached on the subject of their myths and ethnic beliefs.

Its weightiest service will be rendered in the domain of religion, for without mythology there can be no thorough understanding of any religion on earth, either in its inception or its growth.<sup>2</sup>

The next citation shows Mr. Curtin's complete mastery of the subject in hand, and his conclusions are well worth the careful consideration of every student of mythic and legendary lore. In reference to the collection of myths and tales and beliefs he presents the following wise conclusions:

There is everywhere a sort of selvaĝe of short tales and anecdotes, small information about ghosts and snakes, among all these races, which are *easily* obtained, and *most* Europeans seem to think that when they have collected *some* of these trivial things they have all that the given people possess. But they are greatly mistaken. *All these people have something better.* There was not a single stock of Indians in America which did not possess, in beautiful forms, the elements of an extensive literature with a religion and philosophy which would have thrown light on many beginnings of Aryan and Semitic thought, a knowledge of which in so many cases is now lost to us, but which we hope to recover in time . . . if civilized men instead of slaying "savages," directly and indirectly, will treat them as human beings, and not add to the labor of those workers who in the near future will surely endeavor, singly or in small groups, to study the chief primitive races of the earth and win from them, *not short insignificant odds and ends* of information but *great masses of material*; . . . these races possess in large volume some of the most beautiful productions of the human mind, and facts that are not merely of great, but of unique, value.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Curtin, Jeremlah, *Myths and Folk-Tales of the Russians, Western Slavs, and Magyars*, p. vii, Boston, 1890.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. x.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. x-xi.

But we have no tale in which it is clear who all the characters are; the modifying influences were too great and long-continued to permit that. Though myth-tales are, perhaps, more interesting . . . in their present form, they will have not their full interest for science till it is shown who most of the actors are under their disguises.

This is the nearest task of mythology.

There are *masterpieces* in literature *filled with myths*, inspired with myth conceptions of many kinds, simply colored by the life of the time and the nations among which these masterpieces were written and moulded to shape by artists, made strong from the spirit of great, simple people, as unknown to us as the nameless heroes who perished before Agamemnon. How much mythology is there in the Iliad and the Odyssey, in the Æneid, in the Divine Comedy of Dante, in the works of the other three great Italian poets? How much in Paradise Lost? How could "King Lear" and "Midsummer Night's Dream," or the "Idylls of the King," have been written without Keltic mythology? Many of these literary masterpieces have not merely myths in their composition as a sentence has words, but the earlier ones are enlarged or modified myth-tales of those periods, while the later ones are largely modeled on and inspired by the earlier.<sup>1</sup>

Again he declares:

It should be remembered that whatever be the names of the myth-tale heroes at present, the original heroes were not human. They were not men and women, though in most cases the present heroes or heroines bear the names of men and women, or children; they perform deeds which no man could perform, which only one of the forces of Nature could perform, if it had the volition and desires of a person. This is the great cause of wonderful deeds in myth-tales.<sup>2</sup>

With reference to the work already done in American Indian mythology, Mr. Curtin remarks:

We have now in North America a number of groups of tales obtained from the Indians which, when considered together, illustrate and supplement one another; they constitute, in fact, a whole system. These tales we may describe as forming collectively the creation myth of the New World. . . . In some cases, simple and transparent, it is not difficult to recognize the heroes; they are distinguishable at once either by their names or their actions or both. In other cases these tales are more involved, and the heroes are not so easily known, because they are concealed by names and epithets. Taken as a whole, however, the Indian tales are remarkably clear.<sup>3</sup>

As to the content of these American Indian tales and legends, Mr. Curtin says:

What is the substance and sense of these Indian tales, of what do they treat? To begin with, they give an account of how the present order of things arose in the world, and are taken up with the exploits, adventures, and struggles of various elements, animals, birds, reptiles, insects, plants, rocks, and other objects before they became what they are. . . . According to the earliest tales of North America, this world was occupied, prior to the appearance of man, by beings called variously "the first people," "the outside people," or simply "people,"—the same term in all cases being used for people that is applied to Indians at present.

<sup>1</sup> Curtin, Jeremiah, *Myths and Folk-Tales of the Russians, Western Slavs, and Magyars*, p. ix, Boston, 1890.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

<sup>3</sup> Curtin, Jeremiah, *Hero-Tales of Ireland*, pp. ix, x Boston, 1894.

These people, who were very numerous, lived together for ages in harmony. There were no collisions among them, no disputes during that period; all were in perfect accord. In some mysterious fashion, however, each individual was changing imperceptibly; an internal movement was going on. At last a time came when the differences were sufficient to cause conflict, except in the case of a group to be mentioned hereafter, and struggles began. These struggles were gigantic, for the "first people" had mighty power; they had also wonderful perception and knowledge. They felt the approach of friends or enemies even at a distance; they knew the thought in another's heart. If one of them expressed a wish, it was accomplished immediately; nay, if he even thought of a thing, it was there before him. Endowed with such powers and qualities, it would seem that their struggles would be endless and indecisive; but such was not the case. Though opponents might be equally dextrous, and have the power of the wish or the word in a similar degree, one of them would conquer in the end through wishing for more effective and better things, and thus become the hero of a higher cause; that is, a cause from which benefit would accrue to mankind, the coming race.<sup>1</sup>

. . . Among living creatures, we are not to reckon man, for man does not appear in any of those myth tales; they relate solely to extra-human existences, and describe the battle and agony of creation, not the adventures of anything in the world since it received its present form and office. According to popular modes of thought and speech, all this would be termed the fall of the gods, for the "first people" of the Indian tales correspond to the earliest gods of other races.<sup>2</sup>

In the theory of spiritual evolution, worked out by the aboriginal mind of America, all kinds of moral quality and character are represented as coming from an internal movement through which the latent, unevolved personality of each individual of these "first people," or gods, is produced. Once that personality is produced, every species of dramatic situation and tragic catastrophe follows as an inevitable sequence. There is no more peace after that; there are only collisions followed by combats which are continued by the gods till they are turned into all the things, animal, vegetable, and mineral—which are either useful or harmful to man, and thus creation is accomplished. During the period of struggles, the gods organize institutions, social and religious, according to which they live. These are bequeathed to man; and nothing that an Indian has is of human invention, all is divine. An avowed innovation, anything that we call reform, anything invented by man, would be looked on as sacrilege, a terrible, an inexpiable crime. The Indian lives in a world prepared by the gods, and follows in their footsteps—that is the only morality, the one pure and holy religion.<sup>3</sup>

This creation myth of the New World is a work of great value, for by aid of it we can bring order into mythology, and reconstruct, at least in outline, and provisionally, that early system of belief which was common to all races: a system which, though expressed in many languages and in endlessly varying details, has one meaning, and was, in the fullest sense of the word, one—a religion truly catholic and oecumenical, for it was believed in by all people, wherever resident, and believed in with a vividness of faith, and a sincerity of attachment, which no civilized man can even imagine, unless he has had long experience of primitive races.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Curtin, *Jeremiah, Hero-Tales of Ireland*, pp. x, xi, Boston, 1894.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xi.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. xii, xiii.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

The war between the gods continued till it produced on land, in the water, and the air, all creatures that move, and all plants that grow. There is not a beast, bird, fish, reptile, insect, or plant which is not a fallen divinity; and for every one noted there is a story of its previous existence.

This transformation of the former people, or divinities, of America was finished just before the present race of men—that is, the Indians—appeared.<sup>1</sup>

In some mythologies a few personages who are left unchanged at the eve of man's coming transform themselves voluntarily. The details of the change vary from tribe to tribe, but in all it takes place in some described way, and forms part of the general change, or metamorphosis, which is the vital element in the American system. In many, perhaps in all, the mythologies, there is an account of how some of the former people, or gods, instead of fighting and taking part in the struggle of creation and being transformed, retained their original character, and either went above the sky or sailed away westward to where the sky comes down, and passed out under it, and beyond, to a pleasant region where they live in delight. This is that contingent to which I have referred, that part of the "first people" in which no passion was developed; they remained in primitive simplicity, undifferentiated, and are happy at present. They correspond to those gods of classic antiquity who enjoyed themselves apart, and took no interest whatever in the sufferings or the joys of mankind.<sup>2</sup>

Everything in nature had a tale of its own, if some one would but tell it, and during the epoch of constructive power in the race,—the epoch when languages were built up and great stories made,—few things of importance to people of that time were left unconsidered; hence there was among the Indians of America a volume of tales as immense, one might say, as an ocean river. This statement I make in view of materials which I have gathered myself, and which are still unpublished,—materials which, though voluminous, are comparatively meager, merely a hint of what in some tribes was lost, and of what in others is still uncollected. . . .

From what is known of the mind of antiquity, and from what data we have touching savage life in the present, we may affirm as a theory that primitive beliefs in all places are of the same system essentially as the American. In that system, every individual existence beyond man is a divinity, but a divinity under sentence,—a divinity weighed down by fate, a divinity with a history behind it, a history which is tragedy or comedy as the case may be. These histories extend along the whole line of experience, and include every combination conceivable to primitive man.<sup>3</sup>

During eight years of investigation among Indian tribes in North America, I obtained the various parts of that Creation myth mentioned in this introduction, from tribes that were remote from one another, and in different degrees of development. Such tales I found in the east, in the central regions, and finally in California and Oregon. Over this space, the extreme points of which are 3,000 miles apart, each tribe has the Creation myth,—one portion being brought out with special emphasis in one tribe, and another portion in a different one. In tribes least developed, the earliest tales are very distinct, and specially valuable on some points relating to the origin and fall of the gods. Materials from the extreme west are more archaic and simple than those of the east. In fact the two regions present the two extremes, in North America, of least developed and most developed aboriginal thought. In this is their interest. They form one complete system.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Curtin, *Jeremiah, Hero-Tales of Ireland*, p. xiv, Boston, 1894.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xv.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xvi.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. xlix-l.

To sum up, we may say, that the Indian tales reveal to us a whole system of religion, philosophy, and social polity. . . .

Those tales form a complete series. The whole mental and social life of the race to which they belong is evident in them.<sup>1</sup>

The results to be obtained from a comparison of systems of thought like the Indian and the Gaelic would be great, if made thoroughly. If extended to all races, such a comparison would render possible a history of the human mind in a form such as few men at present even dream of,—a history with a basis as firm as that which lies under geology. . . . We must make large additions indeed to our knowledge of primitive peoples. We must complete the work begun in America. . . . The undertaking is arduous, and there is need to engage in it promptly. The forces of civilized society, at present, are destroying on all sides, not saving that which is precious in primitive people. Civilized society supposes that man, in an early degree of development, should be stripped of all that he owns, both material and mental, and then be refashioned to serve the society that stripped him. If he will not yield to the stripping and training, then slay him.<sup>2</sup>

In the United States, little was accomplished till recent years; of late, however, public interest has been roused somewhat, and, since Major Powell entered the field, and became Director of the Bureau of Ethnology, more has been done in studying the native races of America than had been done from the discovery of the country up to that time.<sup>3</sup>

Of course there is no true information in the American ethnic religion as to the real changes which affected the world around us; but there is in it, as in all systems like it, true information regarding the history of the human mind. Every ethnic religion gives us documentary evidence. It gives us positive facts which, in their own sphere, are as true as are facts of geology in the history of the earth's crust and surface. They do not tell us what took place in the world without, in the physical universe, they had no means of doing so; but they do tell us what took place at certain periods in the world of mind, in the interior of man.<sup>4</sup>

An ethnic or primitive religion is one which belongs to people of one blood and language, people who increased and developed together with the beliefs of every sort which belong to them. Such a religion includes every species of knowledge, every kind of custom, institution, and art. Every aboriginal nation or human brood has its gods. All people of one blood and origin are under the immediate care and supervision of their gods, and preserve continual communication and converse with them. According to their own beliefs, such people received from their gods all that they have, all that they practice, all that they know. Such people, while their blood is unmixed and their society unconquered, adhere to their gods with the utmost fidelity.

The bonds which connect a nation with its gods, bonds of faith, and those which connect the individuals of that nation with one another, bonds of blood, are the strongest known to primitive man, and are the only social bonds in prehistoric ages.<sup>4</sup>

A good deal has been given to the world of late on mythology by able writers who with good materials would attain good results; but as the materials at their disposal are faulty, much of their work with all its cleverness is mainly a persistent pouring of the empty into the void.

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<sup>1</sup> Curtin, *Jeremiah, Hero-Tales of Ireland*, p. xlviii, Boston, 1894.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. xlv, xlvii.

<sup>3</sup> Curtin, *Jeremiah, Creation Myths of Primitive America*, pp. xxxi-xxxii, Boston, 1893.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxxii.

We have seen attempts made to show that real gods have been developed by savage men from their own dead savage chiefs. Such a thing has never been done since the human race began, and it could never have been imagined by any man who knew the ideas of primitive races from actual experience or from competent testimony. The most striking thing in all savage belief is the low estimate put on man when unaided by divine, uncreated power. In Indian belief every object in the universe is divine except man.<sup>1</sup> . . .

Vegetable gods, so called, have been scoffed at by writers on mythology. The scoff is baseless, for the first people were turned, or turned themselves, into trees and various plants as frequently as into beasts and other creatures. Maize or Indian corn is a transformed god who gave himself to be eaten to save man from hunger and death. When Spanish priests saw little cakes of meal eaten ceremonially by Indians, and when the latter informed them that they were eating their god, the good priests thought this a diabolical mockery of the Holy Sacrament, and a blasphemous trick of Satan to ruin poor ignorant Indians.

I have a myth in which the main character is a violent and cruel old personage who is merciless and faith-breaking, who does no end of damage till he is cornered at last by a good hero and turned into the wild parsnip. Before transformation this old parsnip could travel swiftly, but now he must stay in one place, and of course kills people only when they eat him.

The treasure saved to science by the primitive race of America is unique in value and high significance. The first result from it is to carry us back through untold centuries to that epoch when man made the earliest collective and consistent explanation of this universe and its origin.

Occupying this vantage-ground, we can now throw a flood of light on all those mythologies and ethnic religions or systems of thought from which are lost in part, great or small, the materials needed to prove the foundation and beginnings of each of them. In this condition are all ancient recorded religions, whether of Greece, Rome, Egypt, Chaldea, Persia, or India.<sup>2</sup>

Again, in speaking of the *first people, the ancients, or the man-beings* of the oldest myth, or rather cycle of myths, in America, Mr. Curtin continues his exposition of the significance of these poetic figures:

After they had lived on an indefinite period, they appear as a vast number of groups, which form two camps, which may be called the good and the bad. In the good camp are the persons who originate all the different kinds of food, establish all institutions, arts, games, amusements, dances, and religious ceremonies for the coming race.

In the other camp are cunning, deceitful beings, ferocious and hungry man-eaters—the harmful powers of every description. The heroes of the good camp overcome these one after another by stratagem, superior skill, swiftness, or the use of the all-powerful wish; but they are immortal, and, though overcome, can not be destroyed. . . .

When the present race of men (that is, Indians) appear on the scene, the people of the previous order of affairs have vanished. One division, vast in number, a part of the good and all the bad ones, have become the beasts, birds, fishes, reptiles, insects, plants, stones, cold, heat, light, darkness, fire, rain, snow, earthquake, sun, moon, stars—have become, in fact, every living thing, object, agency, phenomenon, process, and power outside of man. Another

<sup>1</sup> Curtin, *Jeremiah, Creation Myths of Primitive America*, pp. xxxvii–xxxviii, Boston, 1898.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. xxxviii–xxxix.

party much smaller in number, who succeeded in avoiding entanglement in the struggle of preparing the world for man, left the earth. According to some myths they went beyond the sky to the upper land; according to others they sailed in boats over the ocean to the West—sailed till they went out beyond the setting sun, beyond the line where the sky touches the earth. There they are living now free from pain, disease, and death, which came into the world just before they left, but before the coming of man and through the agency of this first people. . . .

This earliest American myth cycle really describes a period in the beginning of which all things—and there was no thing then which was not a person—lived in company without danger to each other or trouble. This was the period of primeval innocence, of which we hear so many echoes in tradition and early literature, when that infinite variety of character and quality now manifest in the universe was still dormant and hidden, practically uncreated. This was the “golden age” of so many mythologies—the “golden age” dreamed of so often, but never seen by mortal man; a period when, in their original form and power, the panther and the deer, the wolf and the antelope, lay down together, when the rattlesnake was as harmless as the rabbit, when trees could talk and flowers sing, when both could move as nimbly as the swiftest on earth.

Such, in a sketch exceedingly meager and imperfect, a hint rather than a sketch, is the first great cycle of American mythology—the creation-myth of the New World. From this cycle are borrowed the characters and machinery for myths of later construction and stories of inferior importance; myths relating to the action of all observed forces and phenomena; struggles of the seasons, winds, light and darkness; and stories in great numbers containing adventures without end of the present animals, birds, reptiles, and insects—people of the former world in their fallen state. . . .

To whatever race they may belong, the earliest myths, whether of ancient record or recent collection, point with unerring indication to the same source as those of America, for the one reason that there is no other source. The personages of any given body of myths are such manifestations of force in the world around them, or the result of such manifestations, as the ancient myth-makers observed; and whether they went backwards or forwards, these were the only personages possible to them, because they were the only personages accessible to their senses or conceivable to their minds. . . .

Since they had passions varying like those of men, the myth-makers narrate the origin of these passions, and carried their personages back to a period of peaceful and innocent chaos, when there was no motive as yet in existence. After a while the shock came. The motive appeared in the form of revenge for acts done through cupidity or ignorance; strife began, and never left the world of the gods till one quota of them was turned into animals, plants, heavenly bodies, everything in the universe, and the other went away unchanged to a place of happy enjoyment.

All myths have the same origin, and all run parallel up to a certain point, which may be taken as the point to which the least-developed people have risen.<sup>1</sup>

And Mr. Curtin further says:

At that period the earth . . . was occupied by personages who are called people, though it is well understood at all times that they were not human; they were persons, individuals.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Curtin, Jeremiah *Myths and Folk-Lore of Ireland*, pp. 22–27, Boston, 1890.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

To trace the ancestral sources of a people's thought and character, a careful and critical study of the myths, and later of the mythology of that people, first exclusively and then comparatively, is required. This study deals with ideas and concepts expressed by three well-known Greek terms, *mythos*, *epos*, and *logos*, and also with those expressed by the term resulting from the combination of the first and the last of these words. These are among many words of human speech which comprise all human experience and history. It is remarkable also that each may be translated into English by the term "word."

The word "mythology" is a philosophic term composed of two very interesting and instructive Greek words, *mythos* and *logos*.

The first term, *mythos*, denoted whatever was thoughtfully uttered by the mouth of savage and barbaric men—the expression of thought which had been shut in to nature—a story of prehistoric time, a naïve, creative concept stated in terms of human life and activity—a poem. In matters of religion and cosmogony such an utterance was final and conclusive to those men.

The second term, *logos*, having at the beginning approximately the same meaning as *mythos*, became in Greek philosophic thinking the symbol or expression of the internal constitution as well as the external form and sign of thought, and so became "the expression of exact thought— . . . exact because it corresponds to universal and unchanging principles," reaching "its highest exaltation in becoming not only reason in man but the reason in the universe—the Divine Logos, the thought of God, the Son of God, God himself" (Curtin). The *logos* is thus the expression of the philosophy of men measurably cultured; it is the intelligent exegesis of the content of the *mythos* in terms of objective and subjective reality; it is scientific because it is logical; it is the later literary criticism—the analytic and synthetic treatment of myths and epics. So, in the experience of every people having an ethnic past, *mythos* and *logos* represent two well-defined stages of human thought—the naïve and the philosophic—and also the elder time and the modern. So mythology may be defined as the science or the logic of the myth; it belongs to times of relatively high culture and does not flourish in savagery, for savages have only myths. It may be well to note that a third stage of thought is expressed in the Greek term *epos*, which is the adornment or garbing and dramatizing of the myth concepts in poetic form, in story, saga, and legend—the epic.

Only modern research with its critical exegesis and sympathetic interpretation brings down the study of the concepts of the myths of the fathers measurably to the character of a science.

The highest type of poetry expresses itself in myth, in the *epos*, and in the *logos*. For men of undeveloped thought, of inchoate

mentation, this is the mental process through which they dimly apprehend the significance of the complex and closely interrelated phenomena of life and of environing nature, and the medium by which they harmonize the ceaseless functioning of these with their own experience, with the activity of their own subconscious mind, and with the divine promptings and visions vouchsafed them by the dawn of their own superconscious intellect.

The initial step of the process is the ingenuous act of the imagination in personifying, yea, in ideally humanizing, the bodies, elements, and forces of environing nature; as, for instance, the picturing by the Iroquois and their neighbors, the Algonquian, of snow as the living body of a man formed by the God of Winter, whose breath was potent enough to drive animals and birds into their winter retreats and some even into hibernation, represented as the hiding of the animals from his brother, the Master or God of Life.

The next step in the process is the socialization of this vast company—the imputation of life, soul, purpose, and a rational rôle to them constitutes the epic, which is also the poet's handiwork.

As the basis of religious expression, Seneca-Iroquoian myths and legends, in common with those of all other men, are to most people the empty tales of superstition, the foundations of idolatry, because its gods and deities, forsooth, have never actually existed. But myths are fictitious only in form and dress, while they are true in matter and spirit, for truth is congruity between reason and objects, and hence is eternal and universal.

The human side of these personifications of the processes and phenomena of nature in some instances has become so real and so natural that these beings no longer act or function in terms of the processes of nature only, but as the thaumaturgic fetishes of potent sorcerers, performing wonderful feats of *orenda*, as they are represented as doing in a large number of these narratives. Now, these accounts are certainly not myths and are not legends in the true sense of the term, but are, rather, fictitious narratives or tales of reputed individual human achievement, quite incredible, of course, as authentic acts of mankind. They center about the reputed affairs of a human being, or do so at least in the view of the modern story-teller.

In the collection of Seneca narratives of Mr. Curtin eight relate to the Genonsgwa (the Stone Coats or Stone Giants), six to Hi'no<sup>n</sup> (Hinin) or the Thunder People, six to the Dagwanoenyent or Whirlwind People, five to the Shagodiioweq or Wind People, and three to the Djogeon or Dwarf People. It is probable that the two groups of "wind" peoples originally arose from a single personage. From single personages like Hi'no<sup>n</sup> or Thunder, Shagodiioweq or the Wind, and Dagwanoenyent or the Cyclone or Whirlwind, the

story-tellers of to-day have created large bodies of fictitious people, representing a reversal of the original process by which the first great concepts were formed.

But truth seemingly was not readily appreciable by primal men until it was dramatized in saga, in legend, and in myth, in formulas, rites, ceremonies, customs, and material symbols based on those narratives; in short, it had to be couched in terms of human expression and activity. These symbols and figurative expressions bore the fashion and impress of the time and the place, and so before truth so dramatized can be fully understood it must be carefully freed from the garb and trappings of local and temporal use and need; in brief, the literal unreality of myth must be lifted from the substantive and the spiritual realities it symbolizes.

And, for this reason, a deity embodying or representing one of the great recurrent processes of nature or one of the seemingly changeless features of the universe is something vastly more than a mere figment of the human brain; for, although conceived in terms of man, the "deity" in his own sphere and function is limitless in power, incomprehensible in mode of life and action, and abides without beginning of days or end of years—properties which make the god divine and infinitely superior to man, the creature of divine power.

One of the fundamental teachings of the study of the myths of the American Indians is that the so-called Genesis or Creation myths relate the activities and exploits, in more or less detail, of the "elder people," the "first people," whom men later call the gods. Rightly understood and sympathetically conceived, these events are not predicated of human beings as such. These narrations explain in just what manner the present order of things in nature arose; they detail what took place in a condition of things different from the present, and which were, in the minds of their relators, the necessary antecedent processes resulting in the establishment of the present order of nature. They treat only of the "first people." None relate to human beings and none treat of things done since man appeared on earth.

Human in form and in feeling, and yet most divine, were the gods and deities of the ancient Seneca and the other Iroquoian peoples. While the divine social and political organization was necessarily for psychological reasons a close reflex or replica of the human, and although both gods and man derived descent from an original first parent, yet the first divine ancestor was a self-existing god, and the first man was the creature of one of these divine Powers.

The expression of the mythic—the cosmogonic, the cosmologic—in terms of human function and attribute and activity is well illustrated in the legends and myths of the Iroquoian peoples. In these

sagas the personifications of the elements and forces of nature are classified as human by the use of the term *oñ'gwe*, "a human being or mankind" (for the word has both a singular and a plural signification), to designate them.

The task of classifying these narratives, even tentatively, is not an easy one, for the proportion of these stories which seem to be unquestionably fiction to those which are myths and legends is relatively much larger than might be suspected without some investigation. It is clearly wrong to call everything legend or myth when the evidence from the facts seems to forbid such action. For it is evident that very many of the narratives are fiction—stories composed and related to amuse, to mystify, or to glorify some hero, or perhaps to spread the fame of some noted sorcerer and his fetishes.

The setting and the framework of the narrative or story may be taken from a myth and one or more myth episodes incorporated in it, but the result is a fabrication because it does not rest on facts of human experience.

Now, for example, the narratives concerning the so-called Stone Coats, Stone Giants, or the *Genonsgwa* are not myths but legends. These beings do not figure in the Creation Myth of the Iroquois, but are a brood of beings whose connection with Stone is due to false etymology of a proper name in a myth.<sup>1</sup> This is an interesting and instructive example of forgotten derivations of words and names and the resultant new conceptions.

In the Genesis myth of the Iroquoian peoples the Winter Season by personification, was placed in the class of man-beings with the name, "He-who-is-clad-in-ice," or "He-who-is-ice-clad." Now it so happens that the word for ice and for chert or flint stone is derived from a common stem whose fundamental meaning is "glare," "crystal," or "what is ice-like." But the myth-tellers, in order to add an air of the mystical to their recital, did not fail to play on the double meaning of the word for ice, and so represented the Winter Man-being as "The Flint-clad Man-being" rather than as "The Ice-clad Man-being." And the results of Winter's cold and frost were told in terms of flint or chert stone, and so bergs and cakes and blocks of ice became in the narration objects of flint and chert stone. Winter's cold is conveyed from place to place by means of cakes and bergs of ice, which are transformed by the poet into canoes of flint or stone. And in time the stone canoe is transferred from myth to the realm of fiction and legend to glorify the fame of some human hero.

And in the thinking of the Iroquois the Flint-clad Man-being became separated and distinct from the Man-being of the Winter.

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<sup>1</sup> For an extended etymologic demonstration of the facts stated in the text, consult articles *Tawiskaron* and *Nanabozho* by the editor in the Handbook of American Indians (*Bulletin 30 of the Bureau of American Ethnology*).

At this point the fictitious Man-being who was Stone-clad parted company forever with the personified nature force or process that was frost-bearing and ice-clad. The former was gradually reduced to a peculiar species of mankind—the stone giant, for he was represented as stone-clad, while the latter retained his first estate as one of the chief characters in the Genesis myth of the Iroquoian peoples.

The ordinary Iroquoian concept of the Stone Coat or Stone Giant indicates, to the student at least, that the Winter God, the Great Frost Giant of the common Iroquoian Genesis myth, was its source. Aside from the evident etymologic connection, the most significant feature is the constant tradition that the home land of these anthro-poid monsters is in the regions of the north where this same authority usually places the burial place of the Winter God after his defeat and death at the hands of his twin brother, the Life God, sometimes called the Master of Life.

The tales which relate how the Stone Coat people are made from perverse men and women first by carefully covering the body with pitch and then by rolling and wallowing in sand and down sand banks repeatedly, shows how utterly forgotten is the true source of this interesting concept among the story tellers and their hearers. There is no doubt that the original "Stone Coat" was the "Ice-Clad Winter God." In the Curtin collection there are eight stories which refer to the Genonsgwa, or Stone Coats, sometimes called Stone Giants, but there is nothing in them to connect these peculiar fictitious monsters with the original conception. In none are the operations of the winter process predicated of these fictitious beings. They are merely exaggerated human figures and not symbols of a process of nature, their deeds are the deeds of men, and are not the acts of a process of nature expressed in terms of human activity.

And thus is founded the race of the Stone Giants or Stone Coats, or more popularly the Giants. When once these fictitious beings were regarded as human monsters they soon became confused with cruel hermits and bloodthirsty sorcerers who because of evil tastes were cannibals and dwelt apart from the habitations of men, who shunned and feared them, and the tales about them became narratives that do not detail the activities of the Winter God—the personified process of nature; and so, like their human prototypes, they increased and multiplied mightily, and so were as numerous as the leaves on the trees.

The persons or figures produced by the attribution of human life and mind to all objective and subjective things were, by virtue of the reality of the elements they embodied, the deities or the gods of this system of thought. In brief, they were composed of both the metamorphosed and of the unchanged first or ancient people who in distinctive character were conceived of as the formal and outward ex-

pression of human mind. In the course of time these deities or gods are said to have taught their people the arts and crafts and the elements of their culture and their faith, thus revealing their will and the things which were to be in the future. This divine knowledge, this wisdom of the gods, was obtained or revealed in dreams or visions and by theophanies. But a knowledge of the activities of the people holding these views makes it evident that the doctrines and the arts and the crafts taught by the gods and the institutions founded by them for the people are in fact the activities of the people themselves which had been unconsciously imputed to these deities. Of course, the gods can teach and can reveal only what has been before imputed to them by the people.

The original and chief person in the myth was not a human being, although he was represented as possessed of the form, the desires, and the volition of a person. He is reputed to have performed acts which no human being had the power to perform, acts which only the functioning of a process of nature or of life could accomplish.

In some of these narratives human beings, bearing human names, have been substituted and the heroes and heroines of these stories are men, women, and children.

The substitution of human beings in the stead of the personified forces or processes of nature supplies the reason that apparently wonderful superhuman deeds are accomplished by the human substitutes, whereas the acts portrayed are those of natural forces, not of human brain and brawn.

The stories of the Dagwanoenyent, or Flying Heads, Cyclones, and Whirlwinds, of the Genonsgwa, or Stone Coats (the Frost Giants, or Gods of Winter, but originally named Tawiskaron), and of the S'hagodiyowegowa, or Wind God, purport to relate historical events, although they are mythic and legendary in form. But unlettered peoples do not transmit history. The writing of history presupposes not only the art of writing but also some kind of permanent social and political organization. Individual experiences fade rapidly, for lacking the needful general interest they do not unite with others in forming even some phase of the local history of a group. The experiences of individuals and even of small unimportant groups of people also lack the interest necessary to bring about their transmission as history. Hence such uncivilized peoples leave to their posterity no authentic accounts of the events of their times, for only in song and saga, where poetry mingles with fact, do they attempt to transmit the narratives of historical events and experiences.

But with the organization and development of society into greater complexity of social and governmental organization there arises the need for the transmission of a record of tribal or communal ex-

periences in which a certain number of persons are intensely interested—tribal wars, feats and acts and sayings of great leaders and reformers, and other noteworthy public events claim permanency of record, and thus history is written.

Popular tradition treats historical events in a naïve poetical way, and authentic historical experiences may thus be preserved. Through poetic treatment oral tradition becomes legend, so that one of the clearest criterions of legend is the fact that it frequently relates things that are not credible. Legend is the tradition of men who have not the art of writing and is a particular form of poetic narrative. So that in origin and nature history differs from legend because of difference of spheres of interest. Private and personal affairs and experiences and things that are of some interest to the common people and heroes, great personages, and public events and affairs are made attractive to the popular minds by means of poetic treatment. Legend is oral tradition in use among folk who do not make use of writing or other graphic art to secure permanency of record, while history is the written record of events and achievements and thoughts of men, which always presupposes the existence and the practice of graphic or scriptorial art.

Now, oral tradition, or legend, is not transmitted without important variation in details from generation to generation, and so it is an untrustworthy medium for the conveyance of historical events.

The saga, or popular story, may become sacred legend—that is, a characteristically “sacred” narrative about the “first people,” or the gods—or it may remain simply a story or tale. These two classes of story or narrative had specific names among the Seneca and their congeners of the Iroquoian stock. The sacred legend was called *Kā'kāā'*, or *Kā'karā'* by the *r*-using dialects of the Iroquoian tribes. The literal meaning of this noun is not known; in the Onondaga dialect the *k*-sound would be replaced by the *g*-sound. These legends are “sacred” to the extent that they would not be related except during certain seasons of the year for the fear of breaking a religious taboo, forbidding strictly the telling of this class of narrative. The transgression of this prohibition was punished by the offended and vexed “first people,” concerning whom the myths or stories are related, although modern story-tellers, with scarce an exception, who have forgotten the true and logical reason for the inhibition mistakenly declare that the aforesaid penalty would be inflicted by the toads or snakes or by some other subtle animal.

The myths of the American Indian refer to an order of things which preceded the present order, and to a race of man-beings who dwelt first in the world above the sky and later in small number only on this earth and who were the so-called “first people,” “the ancients.”

It is evident that myths of origins project backward to an assumed condition of things the story of a day or of a year, and creation is described as Spring on a universal scale, that is, it explains the manner in which the order of things, existent where the stories are told, came about, as a Rebirth of Nature. But no one will contend that there were human eyewitnesses of what the narratives report.

The wise men, prophets, and priests of tribal men painted these tales with the glamour and witchery of poetry. Myths are the poetic judgments of tribal men about the phenomena of life and the outside world and embody the philosophy of these men about the problems and mysteries of the universe around them and in their own lives. So, in order to understand these narratives, it is necessary to study them with the deepest sympathy. But our sympathy with the viewpoint of the myth narratives of tribal men should not veil the realities of science from our minds.

Piloted by science in seeking to know the truth about the universe, scholars do not expect to discover it in the myth-lore or the folklore of tribal men. To study the birth and the growth of opinions forms one of the most instructive chapters in the science of mind or psychology.

The Seneca name *S'hagodiiowe'* "gōwā or *S'hagodiiowe'qgōwā* designates one of the famous "man-beings" who are of the lineage of the "first people." Some unknowing Indian interpreters render this term erroneously by the English words "false face," which is a translation which effectually conceals the literal meaning of the expression, which is freely "The Great Ones Who Defend Them." But as an appellative the term is also applied to a single one of these fictitious beings. The plural concept is evidently a late development, and probably arose after the establishment of societies whose members, when ceremonially attired, must for one thing wear a wooden mask having as its essential mark a wry mouth. So it is clear that the expression "false face" applies to the members of such societies and not at all to the man-beings so impersonated. The Iroquoian myth of Creation knows only one man-being, who assumed the duty of protecting mankind from pestilence and disease. He was the God of the Air or the Wind, sometimes appearing as the Whirlwind. Ceremonially he is addressed as *S'hedwāsō'dā'* or as *Et'hēsō'dā'*, both meaning "He Who Is Our Grandfather."

It would seem that the pluralizing of the concept has resulted in a marked forgetting of the original objective reality represented in the concept, which in turn detracts from the high esteem in which the original Wind God was held. The Onondaga name of this personage is *Hadu'v'*; the Mohawk, *Akoñ'wārā'*. Both these names have arisen from something peculiar to members of the so-called "False Face Societies," the first meaning, from the common postures

assumed by the members, "hunch-backed," and the second, "mask," from the wooden mask worn by the members of the society when in session. So the expression of the evil side of the manifestations of the Power of the Wind or Air, Pestilence, Disease, and Death may safely be predicated of this member of the "first people."

A god or deity exerts or maintains its influence over the mind and heart of man because it is something more than a mere creature of the human brain. The god exercises certain attributes, peculiarities and forces which place him outside the sphere of human knowledge and experience and competence into a class by himself; he embodies in himself, according to belief, the power to function as a process or force of the universe plus the attributed human faculties and aspect.

Some of the French writers among the early explorers in North America refer to a native belief in "the ancients of animals," which, it was stated, were regarded as the type and the progenitors of each particular species of animal. But this statement gives only a glimpse of a larger faith. These so-called "ancients of animals" were indeed only a part of the great company of "the ancients," "the ancestors," or "the first people," each being a personified element or process of life or of outside nature, who became by fated metamorphosis the reputed progenitors of all faunal and floral life on the earth.

But an interpretative understanding of the Genesis myth of the American Indians shows that these "ancients," these primal "ancestors," were regarded as "human beings," as belonging to that class of animate beings to which the Indian himself belonged. Yet, these "ancients" were the "gods," "the beings," or "the existences," of anthropic form, character, and volition, whose metamorphosis later produced, according to the Indian philosophy, the present order of things on earth. So, the "first beings," conceived as "human beings," were indeed the gods—the personified agents of the powers, processés, and phenomena of nature.

It is this principle of transformation, or metamorphosis, that in part explains why there are represented largely "anthropic gods" with "animal masks" in Central America, Mexico, India, China, Egypt, Babylonia, and Assyria, and not many true "animal gods" with "human masks."

But in some places there arose confusion between these poetic creations of a childlike faith and the lineal ancestors of men. When pride of birth and of position dominated the minds of aristocratic men they sought to trace their pedigree to the gods, and so they blindly claimed descent from these primal gods, who, in their anthropic aspect, were mere fictions of the mind, and so in time and in some lands this process resulted in what is usually called "ancestor worship." This is, therefore, never a primitive faith, but only a decadent culture.

All early men of inchoate mentation, of self-centered thinking, shared their needs and afflictions, their woes and ambitions, their sufferings and aspirations, and their joys and blessings with their gods, feeling that their gods who bore their own likeness by the unconscious imputation of human nature to them were endowed with the attributes, whims, virtues, and frailties of human nature. They believed that their gods must be men—man-beings, men like themselves—else these deities could not foresee and understand their necessities and so could not sympathize with men everywhere. Hence an Iroquois, thinking and speaking of their deities only in terms of human speech and thought, designates a god or other spirit of his faith by the word denoting man, human being, or mankind.

Of the gods and deities of Iroquois myths the editor has written :

Like most American Indian mythologies, the Iroquoian deals with three great mythic cosmical periods. In the first dwelt a race of gigantic anthropic beings—man-beings, let them be called, because though they were reputed to have been larger, purer, wiser, more ancient, and possessed of more potent *orenda* (q. v.), than man, and having superior ability to perform the great elemental functions characterizing definitely the things represented by them, they nevertheless had the form, mien, and mind of man, their creator; for unconsciously did man create the gods, the great primal beings of cosmic time—the controllers or directors, or impersonations, of the bodies and phenomena of nature—in his own image. To these man-beings, therefore, were imputed the thought, manners, customs, habits, and social organization of their creators; notwithstanding this, man regarded them as uncreated, eternal, and immortal; for by a curious paradox, man, mistaking his own mental fictions, his metaphors, for realities, explained his own existence, wisdom, and activities as the divine product of the creations of his own inchoate mind. The dwelling-place of the first great primal beings, characterized by flora and fauna respectively identical with the plant and animal life appearing later on the earth, was conceived to have been the upper surface of the visible sky, which was regarded as a solid plain. Here lived the first beings in peace and contentment for a very long period of time: no one knows or ever knew the length of this first cosmic period of tranquil existence. But there came a time when an event occurred which resulted in a metamorphosis in the state and aspect of celestial and earthly things; in fact, the seeming had to become or to assume the real, and so came to pass the cataclysmic change of things of the first period into that now seen on the earth and in the sky, and the close of this period was the dawn of the gods of this mythology.<sup>1</sup>

So the character and the nature of the deities and spirits of the faith of the Iroquois peoples were a direct reflex of those attributes of the people themselves. It may be inferred in general that the more primitive and cultureless the people are the more crude, the more barbaric and savage will be their conceptions of their gods and the nature and functions of these naïve creations, but, conversely, it is only with the possession of a higher degree of intelligence that come nobler, more refined, grander, and more spiritual ideas of their gods. This admits of no exception.

<sup>1</sup> Handbook of American Indians, pt. 2, p. 720.

Whatever, therefore, the final terms are in which men at any time and place define their deities, the premises of their reasoning about them is always quite the same—namely, to define the *unknown man* in terms of the *known men* themselves—but this *known quantity*, man, is variable and inconstant, changing with time and place. All powers and functions and attributes of mind and body, inherent in man and distinctive of him—no matter whether beneficent or evil—men imputed to their gods in more or less idealized form.

Guided by inchoate reasoning, the crude thinking of unscientific minds, all early men, responsive to external stimuli and the internal yearning for truth, ascribed to their gods and spirits not only all human functions and attributes measurably idealized, but also all their arts and social and religious institutions were likewise attributed, probably quite unconsciously, to their gods and deities. These anthropic features and activities and anthropopathic mind were not ascribed, of course, to other men, but rather to the so-called “first people”—the personified, animated and *humanized* phenomena and processes of nature, of the environments of their experience. Thus, the social and institutional organization of the gods becomes a somewhat idealized epitome or reflex of the human society as it existed and exists among the people in whose minds these divine organizations had their origin. By so doing men painted, either consciously or unconsciously, in their religious activities and in their god-lore a faithful picture of the earliest culture and civilization of their own ethnic progenitors.

Hence, when authentic historical records are wanting the student may by close and sympathetic analysis and interpretation of the myths and the religion of a people acquire a fairly accurate knowledge of the history and culture of such a people. In this manner, indeed, the gods verily become the *revealers* of all history and the teachers of the arts and crafts and industries and the true founders of the institutions—human and divine—to that people. In this interaction of the human mind with the forces and phenomena of life and environing nature lies the true source of inspiration and prophecy. The history of the gods is the history of man. Because the gods, in general, symbolize universal processes in life and nature they and their attributes and functions in time become more or less highly idealized creations of the conscious, the subconscious, and the superconscious thinking of men.

The lesson of these myths and legends is that man is other than the material world; that while he is in it he is not of it; that while he feels nature's elemental activities impelling him and impinging on his senses, his apprehensive yearning heart sees the beckoning finger of a higher and nobler destiny.

All bodies of myths agree perfectly on one fundamental principle, transformation, through which all things on this earth have become what they are.

This principle of metamorphosis indicates the mental process by which these things were represented as becoming what they seemed to be—animated things, subjectively endowed with human form, thought, and volition, to explain the phenomena of life and surrounding nature.

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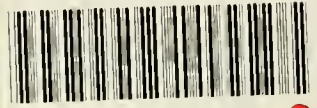








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